



# Oak Leaves

Newsletter of the ELS Historical Society

Volume 11

Spring (May) 2007

Issue 1

## ARTIFACTS ROADSHOW

**Annual Meeting**

**Saturday, June 16, 2007**

*Reservation form on page 11.*

LETTERS, clothing, personal items from the past, are probably lying somewhere in your house. What is the best way to preserve them and restore them? Each item has its own special concerns. But they can be saved, restored, and passed on to future generations.

Part of our annual meeting this year will be a discussion and demonstration of preserving artifacts. Shelley Harrison of the Blue Earth County Historical Society will share her expertise and give practical advice for all of us.

We will also hear about important correspondence from S. C. Ylvisaker while he was studying in Leipzig, and N. A. Madison's letters to military personnel during World War II.



### How to Preserve Artifacts

**PLEASE BRING YOUR** questions, pictures, or other small items to the annual meeting to learn how to preserve them.

**Shelley Harrison of the Blue Earth County Historical Society** will discuss, demonstrate, and answer questions about techniques for preserving textiles, paper, and other important artifacts.



## Rev. Harstad Arrives, Bygland Congregation Organized

Reprinted with permission from *Bygland: Through Seventy-five Years 1874-1949*

By Alfred Solstad



REV. Bjug Harstad came to the Red River Valley in 1874 as missionary pastor for the Norwegian Synod. He resided in Traill County, Dakota Territory. Pioneers described Harstad as of small build but possessing a great deal of physical strength, vitality and energy. His zeal and devotion to his calling as a minister of the gospel was unbounded.

Harstad like all the earliest settlers in Bygland was born and raised in Setesdal, Norway. He received his college and seminary education in this country. He was gifted with a friendly personality, met people easily and was very simple and democratic in his ways. His deep-seated sense of humor was appreciated very much in pioneer days.

As soon as Harstad arrived he acquired a pair of fast Indian ponies, which he broke and hitched on to a buckboard. This was the lightest four-wheel vehicle built in pioneer days. With this method of transportation he covered the far-flung mission field with great regularity and quite speedily, as pioneer conditions knew speed.

This pioneer pastor and trail-blazer for the Gospel of Christ, covered much territory, organized many communities into Lutheran congregations. He asked very little in return for what he gave of service and devotion to the ministry.

When Harstad first visited Bygland in

1874 he found the settlers shy and afraid to visit with him. However, Daniel Ose wanted to find out about him and stopped him near his place and a long conference followed. Ose explained that Rev. Hagboe had admonished them to give neither hearing or house "to the false prophets that soon would come, wearing long black robes." Ose asked Rev. Harstad to leave pamphlets regarding the Synod's teachings and faith and he would consult and discuss these things with his neighbors and inform Harstad of developments. If the reaction was favorable they would invite Harstad to return. The result was that much interest was found for the return of Harstad.

It is of historic interest to analyze why Bygland people turned away from Setesdal Congregation organized by Hagboe and turned to Harstad for spiritual leadership. In the first place there was reaction against being an annex of the Sand Hill Congregation. Did anyone yet find a "Setesdøl" that did not think he was the equal to the good folks from other "Bygdelags" in Norway? It is also plain that Harstad's urbane and friendly, democratic personality counted heavily in favor of the Synod. Most heavily of all counted the fact that Harstad represented the group that built and propagated a church exactly similar to the mother church in their homeland.

November 8, 1874 was the date selected that the few settlers of Norwegian descent gathered to meet with Rev. Harstad. The place was the home of Knut Sorenson on Section 16. This is the land now owned and occupied by Mrs. Mabel Moe. Tradition has it that this home was a small log house with roof covered with dirt and at the time of organization the ground served as floor in the

house.

We heard Rev. Harstad tell about this first meeting. The people were there waiting for him when he came. He first conducted service. Then a meeting was called, at which Harstad acted as chairman and Halvor Tharaldson as secretary. Then and there the congregation was organized. It adopted the name: Bygland Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Congregation. The charter members were the two brothers Halvor and Osmund Tharaldson, Knut Sorenson, Asbjørn Olson and Torkel Bjørnson. Rev. Harstad was urged to serve it as temporary pastor until permanent arrangements for a pastor could be made. This he did until November 1876.

The meeting brought out an interesting incident. Daniel Ose who had worked so strongly for inviting Harstad to organize the Bygland Congregation tactfully abstained from joining at this first meeting. He had joined the group organized by Rev. Hagboe and had hopes that they would come as a group into Bygland church. At a later date most of this group did join.

The minutes show that the congregation had its next meeting on December 1st, 1874. At this meeting the congregation voted to build a church. The dimensions decided on were, length 24 ft., width 16 ft. oak logs not less than seven inches thick at top and hewed flat on two sides were to be used. Those that had timber should furnish some logs each and those that did not have timber should furnish labor. The question then arose where should it be built. It took a long time to decide.

The question was discussed at three meetings in 1875 and no decision reached. Finally a committee consisting of Halvor Tharaldson, Knut Sorenson and Daniel Ose was set up to study the question and bring in a recommendation. The committee did good work. They recommended that the church be built and cemetery established at a point half way between Halvor Tharaldson and Daniel

Ose. This place was also to be adjacent to where they believed the county would layout a main road. The point that answered to the recommendation of this committee was determined to be where the cemetery is across the road from the present church.

This land was railroad land and permission, it seems, was obtained to stake out a piece 18 rods long and 14 wide for a "graveyard" as the minutes have it. There was no title vested in the congregation until 24 years later when the owner then signed a deed.

The minutes of the congregation for many of the first years show that the members had great concern about the cemetery. For one thing they were concerned about the uncertainty of life. They seemed to feel what is expressed in this little verse.

*Death rides on every passing breeze,  
He lurks in every flower.  
Each season has its own decease,  
Its peril every hour.*

Another reason was that they had inherited the religious belief that the loved ones must be laid away in ground consecrated and dedicated for that purpose in the name of the Triune God.

The congregation did not get its church built in 1875. Two things delayed it. The long discussion as to location and a very wet summer making the ground so soft that logs could not be hauled to the building site.



The congregation meeting on October 1st, 1875, seems to be a red-letter day in its

early history. On that day eight families were admitted to membership. It was decided that a parochial school should be held. Kittel Myrom was elected teacher. He was to have one dollar a week salary and house and board for himself and daughter. He was to conduct school for one week at a time at all such places that could take in himself and daughter. Another thing done was to elect a "klokker." This was a very important post in the church of the pioneers. When the minister commenced service he knelt before the altar and the klokker stood in front of the audience and read the opening prayer. The klokker then announced the hymn and led the hymn singing. He had to be able to start the hymn properly and keep the correct time and tune. Next to the minister the "klokker" was the important leader in the congregation. The first man elected to this position was Daniel Ose.

We have before us the report of Bygland Congregation for 1875. We note that the members were 31 in number of which 29 were confirmed. There was one child baptized and one confirmed. There were two burials, 32 communicants and nine services were held. Financially the congregation was apparently without funds. Generally speaking the members had practically no money back in 1875.

In 1876 only one congregation meeting was held. It was a year of progress — with plenty of hardship. Logs were hauled together in the winter for the church and it was built during the summer and fall. The membership grew to 89. It is noted that many children arrived as of the 89 members, 26 were below confirmation age. Services were seven and there were 83 communicants.

Most important was the decision made to form a new parish with Bygland as the place where the pastor should reside. The parish consisted of Bygland, St. Petri and Zion Congregations in Polk County and Walle in Dakota Territory. A letter of call was sent to

the Church Council of the Norwegian Synod authorizing them to select the man.

The Church Council selected the theological student Hans P. Solstad to send the call to. He accepted and was ordained in June 1876. He, however, could not begin his work until November 1876 as Rev. H. A. Preus, the President of the Synod, requested that he serve as his assistant from his ordination until late in October that year. We believe in modern language this would be called serving as intern to be further educated in the calling of Minister of the Gospel.

We have the Letter of Call and explanatory letter in our files. They have some historic interest. We therefore include them in translation.

*Letter of Call:*

*To the Honorable Church Council for the Synod of the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.*

*The undersigned congregations do hereby appeal to the honorable Church Council to render them the service, on our behalf, to extend a call to an able pastor for us. The authorization to do so is hereby granted you.*

*Of our pastor we will require that he believes in and teaches according to the Holy Scriptures and the confessional doctrines of the Lutheran Church.*

*That his personal life is such as is worthy of a servant of God and the congregation.*

*We on our part pledge:*

*That we will obey the word of God and its mandates. That we will show him the respect required of us in the Word of God.*

*That we will, according to our ability, contribute towards his salary.*

*Signed:*

*St. Petri Congregation*

*Ole L. Lunde and Arne Knudson, Trustees, February 7th, 1876*

*Walle Congregation*  
*Ole Nelson Loyland, Arne Olson Fladeland, and*  
*Kittel Olson Myrom, Trustees, February 11th, 1876*  
*Bygland Congregation*  
*Halvor Tharaldson, Daniel E. Ose, and Tjostol*  
*Sorenson, Trustees, February 13th, 1876.*  
*Zion Swedish-Norwegian Congregation*  
*Peder Corneliusen, Charles Matson, Even E.*  
*Gevanord, Trustees, February 20th, 1876.*  
*Caledonia, Traill County, Dakota Territory*  
*April 6th, 1876*

*These Congregations are located:*

*St Petri Congregation: by Red River, a couple miles south of Sand Hill River, Polk County, Minnesota. A few of the members live on the Dakota side in Traill Co. North Dakota. This congregation was organized May 11th, 1875.*

*Walle Congregation: by Red River in Grand Forks County, Dakota Territory, eight miles south from a little town, Grand Forks. Congregation organized February 11th, 1876.*

*Bygland Congregation: Directly across from Walle on the Minnesota side. Only Red River and a couple of miles of timber separate these two. Congregation organized November 8th, 1874.*

*Zion Swedish-Norwegian Congregation: Approximately 16 miles east, near a little town by the name Crookston in Polk County, Minnesota. Congregation organized November 9th, 1874.*

*Sixteen miles south of Bygland, where I think the pastor should reside, is where St. Petri Congregation is located.*

*Northwest, North and North East from Bygland are large stretches of unsettled land, good land and timber. Likely Norwegians from older settlements, even this spring, will move on to this land.*

*An efficient pastor could, I firmly believe, here perform a blessed mission work.*

*In my Parochial Report for this year, it is shown that I have organized 11 congregations, with a total of 345 members. When I*

*remember that in 1874 I started out with, in all, 11 families, this must indeed be considered a beautiful increase. Outwardly the work has succeeded way beyond expectations.*

*In the inner growth, especially in mature years, which is first and last the object of our work, much is lacking. Miserliness, drinking, dancing and other worldly desires are on the increase to an alarming extent as immigration and temporal means increase. This is specially apparent in three of these congregations.*

*I cannot complain of poor attendance at services. Everywhere the demand is for frequent religious services. There is a strong desire for religious instruction for the children. Registration for the Lord's Supper, no one has neglected to do. In three of these congregations there have been a few weeks parochial school. In the other I have myself instructed the children as much as I found time for.*

*With heartfelt greetings from.*

*Your Associate,*

*B. Harstad.*



## Parsonage Life in the 1930's

By Naomi (Madson) Petersen

ON December 12, 1929, I was born in the rural parsonage at Santiago, Minnesota, (rural Princeton). Here I lived with my parents and six siblings, until the age of seventeen years. Our two-story parsonage was right across the driveway from our stucco and wood framed church, which my father served.

I didn't realize how difficult it must have been for my parents to have reared a family of seven children during those Depression Years. Most of our neighbors and members in the church lived as what we today would consider the poverty level. We had no plumbing facilities in the house until the middle of the 1930s. Our electricity was run on a battery-operated generator in the basement.

On the parsonage property there was a small barn with attached "chicken coop" and a storage garage. Chores were necessary as we had several cows to be milked every day, eggs to be picked, and the barn area kept clean. In the summer we weeded our cornfield and mowed lawns. My sisters and I cleaned the house every Saturday from top to bottom.

My siblings and I attended a one-room parochial school, which was owned and supported by our Lutheran church. The average attendance per year was in the 20s. We usually walked the one and a half miles to and from school each day.

My father conducted family devotions after breakfast and supper each day, sometimes having us memorize a Bible passage after our supper devotion. My father believed strongly in memorization, so he encouraged us to memorize hymns and many Bible passages, which I greatly appreciate to this day.

Very often in the winter, after our eve-

ning meal and devotions, my father would gather us children around him, as he sat in his big easy chair, and read stories to us from Aesop's Fables, and Anderson's and Grimm's Fairy Tales.

We children made our own fun. We played in the attic on rainy days, and played different yard games and softball outside. We had no TV to watch and a new radio was given to us by a relative in 1938.



*Norman, Naomi, Paul, Gudrun, Juul, Vivian Madson, about 1934  
Andrew was born later*

During the winter months our church choir practiced in our home (the parsonage) on Friday evenings, to alleviate heating up the church. I remember this with fondness as we were allowed to sit on the staircase and hear them practice.

I do remember neighboring pastors' families from around the area (LCMS and WELS) who would come and visit on a Sunday afternoon, especially in the summer. This was looked upon with great anticipation by my brothers and me for we had other "PK Kids" to play with. We had a large yard to play in and farm animals to observe, which was a special enjoyment for the "city kids."

The parochial school teacher lived in our home and became like a member of the family.

Reverence for God's Word was established early in our lives as children, which God be thanked, remained with us through-

out our journey here on earth.

*Naomi Petersen lives in North Mankato, MN, with her husband, the Rev. Wilhelm W. Petersen, who served a parish pastor and seminary president for many years.*

## Stuck In the Mud

By Amanda Madson

THE snowstorms in Iowa left big piles of snow in the ditches and fields. Spring arrived in March. The snow melted. The ditches and fields were filled with ponds of water. The roads became soft and muddy.

Teacher Luther Vangen let the Lime Creek students play in the ditches. They made little boats of paper or sticks and let them float on the water. They wore rubber boots over their shoes so they could walk in the mud.



*Luther Vangen family in 1952*

The school car came from Lake Mills every morning. Teacher Vangen drove the

car. It was a "Dodge." An extra board was behind the front seat so three rows of children fit into the car.

The bottom of the car scraped the mud in the roads. In the morning, the roads were hard so the car did not drive deep into the mud. But the sun made the roads warm and melted more snow and ice.

In the afternoon, the roads were soft and muddy. At four o'clock, all the children climbed into the car for their ride to Lake Mills. Teacher drove slowly and he was worried. He saw a big hole, deep in the road. The hole was filled with mud.

"If I drive very fast, maybe we can go through the muddy hole. Here we go!" he shouted.

Teacher drove as fast as he could but the car stopped. It was stuck in the mud. It could not move.

"Get out of the car. I will walk over to the farm near the school. The farmer will have to pull the car from the mud," said Teacher Vangen.

All the students got out of the car. They carried their dinner pails. They walked through the mud, into the ditch, and up a little hill where the grass was dry and warm from the sunshine. Amanda opened her dinner pail. She found one peanut-butter sandwich and one cookie. All the children looked in their dinner pails to find the food they had saved for their trip back to Lake Mills. While Teacher walked to the farm, the children sat on the hill in the sun and ate food

from their noon lunches. They sat and sat and sat.

Finally they saw someone coming on the road. The farmer was leading two horses. They were pulling a small wooden wagon. The wagon carried long wooden boards. Teacher was walking beside the wagon. He was covered with mud.

The farmer told the horses, "Whoa, Whoa! Stand still while we unload the boards."

Teacher and the farmer lifted the long planks (boards) from the wagon. They laid the planks in the mud behind the car. They laid 4 planks behind the right wheel and 4 planks behind the left wheel.

"Get in the car. Put it in reverse so it can go backwards," the farmer told Teacher.

The farmer unhitched the wagon from the horses. He turned the horses around in the mud. "Stand still!" he shouted, "while I hitch you to the car!"

The children watched from the hill. But Teacher told the big boys, "Get in the mud in front of the car. When I tell you to push, push very hard."

The farmer stood in front of the horses. He pulled on their reins and shouted to them, "Giddeyup! Giddehup!" The horses knew they should start to pull the car. Teacher started the car engine and pushed the accelerator to the floor. The Dodge engine roared!

Teacher shouted to the boys, "Push! Push as hard as you can!"

The engine roared, the horses pulled and the boys pushed. Finally the car moved a little so the farmer put the ends of the wooden planks under the back wheels. As soon as the wheels were on the planks, the horses could pull faster. Teacher let the motor roar. The big boys pushed harder. And the car moved slowly out of the mud hole on to the short road made of planks.

The planks led to the hard road. The horses had pulled the car out of the mud hole. All the children shouted "Thank-you!" to the horses. The farmer hitched the horses to the wagon and slowly they walked back to their farm. The farmer left the wooden planks in the road for other cars to use.

Teacher drove backwards to the school. He turned the car around on the schoolyard and drove to Lake Mills on a different muddy road. But he did not get stuck.

The children all got home safely but their clothes, shoes and boots were covered with mud. They all said, "It was fun to get stuck in the mud. We hope the horses had fun, too."

The End

*Amanda Madson wrote several childhood stories while teaching English to children in Korea in 2003. She and her husband, Pastor Norman Madson, live in North Mankato, MN.*

Send us *your* ideas, articles, and suggestions for **Oak Leaves**. We welcome information and articles on church anniversaries, and articles of Synodical and local significance.

And remember to visit the Historical Society's website:

**[www.evangelicalluthersynod.org/history](http://www.evangelicalluthersynod.org/history)**

OR

**[www.els.name/history](http://www.els.name/history)**

# From the Archives

*What is it? Story in the next issue.*



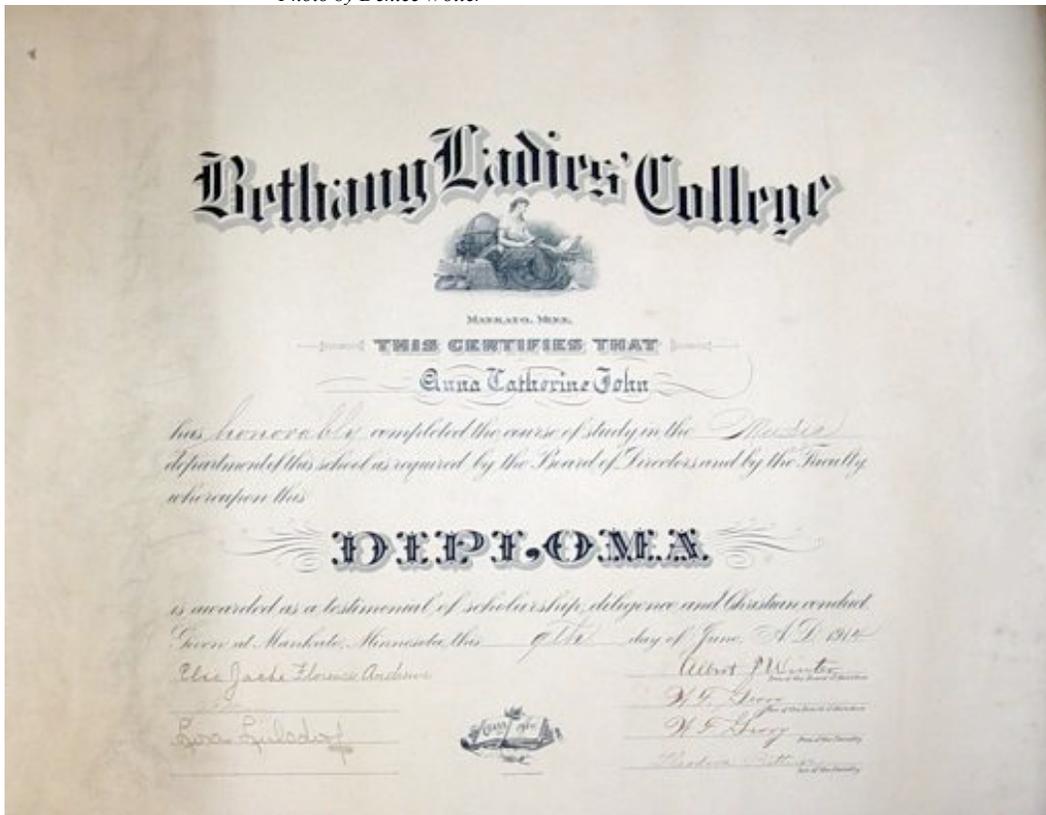
*Photo by Denice Woller*

*From the last issue:*

This uniform is from Bethany Ladies' College. One of the first students to enroll was Anna John (Silber). Her diploma is shown below. The recital hall in the Ylvisaker Fine Arts Center is named in her honor.



*Photo by Denice Woller*



## Resources for Synod History

YOU can find history in all sorts of places. In your attic, your church office or library, and on the Internet.

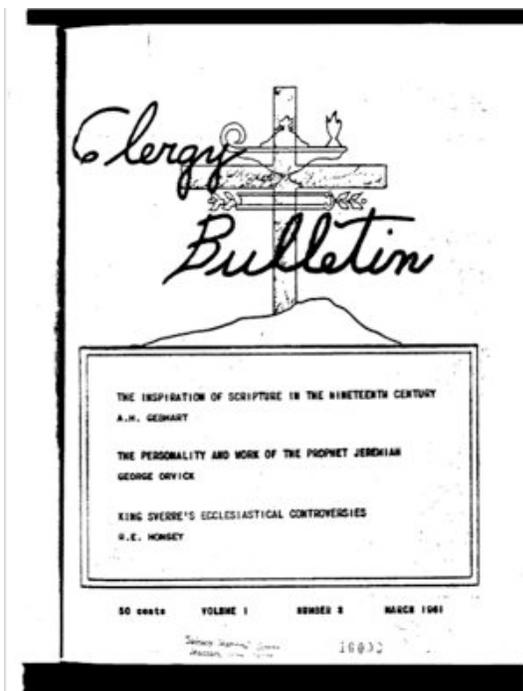
The Internet has exploded in recent years, and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod is making its contribution.

On the Synod website you will find many past Convention addresses by the synod presidents.

<http://www.evangelicalluthersynod.org/publications/essays/presaddresses>

On the Seminary website ([www.blts.edu](http://www.blts.edu)) you will find more and more essays and articles, including the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* and its forerunner, *Clergy Bulletin*. You can download the *Clergy Bulletin* and see what was happening from 1941 through 1961.

<http://blts.edu/lsq/index.htm>



There are also many essays available on various topics.

<http://blts.edu/essays/index.htm>

The ELS Historical Society has a website as well. You can read some back issues of *Oak Leaves* and get other information.

[www.evangelicalluthersynod.org/synod/history/index\\_html](http://www.evangelicalluthersynod.org/synod/history/index_html)

The Rev. H. M. Tjernagel of the Jerico-Saude parish in Iowa published a newsletter entitled *The Assistant Pastor* for most of the years from 1926-1945. Several photocopies have been made for members.



Perhaps your church has a newsletter than could be digitized and put on the web, or selected old church bulletins, especially special services such as festivals, installations, ordinations, confirmations, etc.

YOU are a wonderful resource for Synod History. We would love to hear your stories and share them with others. Write down some of your memories of Sunday School, confirmation, growing up in the Synod or other events and send them to us. History is a living thing and a part of all of us.

Tell us the history of your family, your church, your school.

**ELS Historical Society — Eleventh Annual Meeting**  
**Saturday, June 16, 2007**



***Preserving Our Heritage***  
***Through Correspondence and Artifacts***

Place: **Bethany Lutheran College**  
Ylvisaker Fine Arts Center  
Mankato, Minnesota



9:00 am - Registration & Coffee

9:30 am - Opening Devotion

9:45 am - **Preserving Our Heritage through Correspondence**

**I. Letters from Leipzig: The Correspondence of S. C. Ylvisaker**

Presented by Professor Erling T. Teigen

10:45 am - Break

11:00 am - **II. Letters from World War II: Wartime Correspondence of N. A. Madson**

Presented by the Rev. Paul G. Madson

Noon - Lunch (*Reservations and advance payment required. See below*)

1:15 pm - Business Meeting

1:30 pm - **Preserving Our Heritage through Artifacts**

Presented by Shelley Harrison of the Blue Earth  
County Historical Society

2:30 pm - **Preserving Artifacts**

Shelley Harrison will discuss, demonstrate, and  
answer questions about techniques for preserving  
textiles, paper, and other important artifacts.

3:30 pm - Closing Devotion and Coffee

**Voting Membership:**

\$10/year: individual

\$15/year: husband & wife

**Associate Membership:**

\$15/year: individual

\$25/year: institutional

\$5/year: student

**Lifetime Membership:**

\$200

*For further information, contact Robin Ouren, [heyrab@hickorytech.net](mailto:heyrab@hickorytech.net) or 507-246-5309  
or [Elsa.Ferkenstad@blc.edu](mailto:Elsa.Ferkenstad@blc.edu) or 507-344-7354.*

**Dinner  
reservation  
and  
payment  
must be  
received by  
June 1.**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**City:** \_\_\_\_\_ **State:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Zip:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Membership dues (see chart) = \$** \_\_\_\_\_

**\_\_\_\_\_ number of people attending luncheon x \$10 = \$** \_\_\_\_\_

**Total = \$** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please send payment for luncheon and membership by June 1 to:  
ELS Historical Society - 6 Browns Court - Mankato, MN 56001**

**Oak Leaves**  
ELS Historical Society  
6 Browns Court  
Mankato, MN 56001

## Renew your membership!

ELS Historical Society

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Send completed form and check (see box below right  
for type of membership and correct amount) to:

ELS Historical Society

6 Browns Court — Mankato, MN 56001

**Oak Leaves** is published periodically by the Evangelical Lutheran  
Synod Historical Society, 6 Browns Court — Mankato, MN  
56001

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**Board of Directors:** Robin Ouren (Chair), Peter Anthony, Craig Ferk-  
enstad, Mark Harstad, Betsy Hermanson, Ryan MacPherson, Paul  
Madson, John Moldstad, Marguerite Ylvisaker.

**Oak Leaves** welcomes articles of both Synodical and local signifi-  
cance for publication. Articles maybe edited for style, clarity, or  
length to allow for publication. Submitted manuscripts will be  
deposited in the archives of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

### MEMBERSHIP

All membership  
renewals are due **June 1**

**Voting Membership:**  
\$10/year: individual  
\$15/year: husband & wife

**Associate Membership:**  
\$15/year: individual  
\$25/year: institutional  
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